

Introduction

'It is always possible to find a solution to any conflict, and non-military actors, like civil society, can have a role'. These words, uttered by the former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari to an attentive audience of scholars and students at the Oxford Union in December 2012, offer the best foreword to the topic that is problematised and confronted in this book. The civil-society capability to influence global politics is the increasing concern of social scientists and policy-makers. This capability depends to a large extent on the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), national and international associations, and lobbies that represent civil-society interests. In order to represent the demands that cut across the borders of states, NGOs need suitable access to decision-making institutions. They participate in many transnational and world-level actions and programmes, and are also recognised by policy-makers as actors of the world political system, the reserved domain of the states. This condition is linked to the general, and controversial, issue of NGOs' engagement in political participation, representation and democratisation of the decision-making processes of international organisations.

It is true that global civil society cannot be reduced to NGOs and cannot be understood without them, since they represent those actors who have structured a dialogue with the intergovernmental dimension of the global system.

The United Nations (UN) has reached the highest level of institutionalisation of dialogue with civil society by delegating to ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) the task of establishing a special procedure of recording, accreditation and provision of consultative status. These practices constitute a consistent model that has been claimed to rule the relationships with civil society also in other contexts, regional and local ones. Within the European Union (EU) system, the dialogue with civil society and NGOs has been reinterpreted in terms of a very flexible set of practices. The lack of a rigid

accreditation procedure has enlarged participation to a vast number of actors and, at the same time, forced organisations to select those more responsive bodies and to strengthen and concentrate pressure on them.

Consideration of the two different models drives the analysis, first, to the fact that NGOs' effectiveness continues to depend on the access granted to them by state governments and international governmental organisations (IGOs), and, second, to the recognition that such dialogue cannot work only in a one-sided way, that is, formal rules versus informal practices. In both the UN and the EU, a dominant top-down approach has tried to profit from NGOs' skills by orienting their aims and attitudes through political constraints. On the other hand, NGOs have replied with a robust bottom-up set of initiatives, which have institutionalised and implemented several rules and procedures. The troubled coexistence of the two approaches – a marriage or a contract, depending on the working conditions – is shaping an increasing number of policy areas and introducing alternative forms of governance. It fits coherently into a process of expansion of the global public space that has produced, at the end of the Cold War, a world governmental structure based on multilateral practices.

For this reason, NGOs have an impact on the transformation of the structure and processes of world politics. The participation in humanitarian intervention and peace operations represents a policy area in which such a set of processes may be operationalised and tested. In particular, NGOs can be analysed as members of the 'humanitarian system', which is here defined as the set of principles, actors, policies, practices, rules and procedures that shape interventions in harmony with current global trends. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines the term 'impact' as 'the positive and negative, primary and secondary, long-term effects produced by development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended' (OECD, 2002, p. 5). Therefore knowledge about approaches to global security and crisis management is of great importance to understanding both the international roles of the NGOs and the transformation of the nature, composition and actions of multilateral missions.

Over the years, the study of civil society and NGOs has been increasing greatly and major schools in International Relations and Sociology have produced several interpretations of the ways in

which they act and accomplish their aims, stressing crucial topics, that is, independence, accountability and neutrality. This book does not aim to add further reflections on such assumptions, but to shed new light on the relationship between non-state actors and IGOs in very sensitive policy areas, in those political innovations where they are expected to increase and diversify, and on the effective coordination mechanisms as applied in the field.

Also, it aims to address two critical aspects: first, to analyse the potential for NGOs' innovative roles in humanitarian actions, beyond traditional literature and/or old-fashioned clichés; and second, to offer a data-based analysis of the existing relations between governmental and non-governmental actors in the field of security management.

The research is based on a prevalent institutionalist framework, which also stresses the meaning of comprehensive security, according to the Copenhagen School, and on an empirical analysis, based on data provided by a piece of *ad hoc* survey research. In the period between November 2009 and February 2011, extensive interviews were mainly conducted in Geneva and Brussels with representatives of 28 humanitarian NGOs and networks of NGOs active in the fields of humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and conflict transformation and mediation.

Within this theoretical framework and empirical base, the research aims to reply to the following questions:

- Is there a preferred model of dialogue with IGOs?
- How and why do NGOs sometimes coordinate with IGOs even though they are first of all independent actors?
- How do NGOs try to influence decisions in the field of crisis management, and in particular as far as humanitarian intervention is concerned?
- What roles are they expected to play in parallel or alongside intergovernmental actors?

A deeper examination of how security and crisis management have evolved in shaping the humanitarian system will facilitate the measurement of the specific impact NGOs have on the field and in relationship with other actors – in particular, the interactions with the major IGOs responsible for security management and peace provision (in terms of mechanisms), the controversial 'relations'

with the military (in terms of coordination) and the old and new roles exerted during all the phases that constitute the crisis process (in terms of tasks) will represent the ideal factors for making such a measurement.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into two main parts, aiming, first, to present the relations between IGOs and NGOs in general issues and comparing the two different models of dialogue, and, second, to introduce and describe the humanitarian system (how it actually is and works) for clarifying the place NGOs have within it.

Chapter 1 is mainly a conceptual and theoretical chapter, influenced by the pluralist and institutionalist approach to the topic. It examines international civil society as a set of world-system actors, consistent with the existing literature. It reviews the organisational structure, aims and mandates of NGOs.

In the UN, the institutionalisation of dialogue between IGOs and NGOs and other civil-society organisations has been achieved by delegating to ECOSOC the task of attributing to NGOs what is termed 'consultative status'. The ECOSOC model has been claimed to rule the relationships between civil-society organisations and regional and local IGOs. However, in organisations like the EU, other aspects come into play. The participation of civil-society associations in the policy-making process of the EU is crucial to strengthening the legitimacy of the integration process. For this reason, the differentiated structure of the interests represented by NGOs and community-based organisations imposes the need to supersede the model of consultation and develop a more effective and integrated system of participation of civil society in the EU's decision-making process. Thus Chapter 2 focuses on the formal and non-formal procedures that shape interactions between NGOs and the UN and the EU.

The support of expertise and in-the-field knowledge and action that NGOs are able to offer to world and regional organisations allows IGOs to meet the most recent challenge they are presently dealing with. The changing nature of social and political conflicts around the world has brought about a parallel transformation of the tools major states employ for conflict management and, conse-

quently, humanitarian intervention, and this has opened political space for NGO influence. The increased number of violent conflicts since the 1970s, the worsening of economic and social conflicts in many transition countries (especially during the 1980s), and the devolution of violence control and management to the UN and other regional organisations at the end of the Cold War are the main political factors explaining the rising number of humanitarian interventions.

Chapter 3 focuses on the ability of NGOs active in the field of conflict management and peacebuilding activities to face and adapt to the changes affecting global security.

Although provisions on peacekeeping operations are not included in the UN Charter, interposition missions for controlling truces and ceasefires, and for interrupting aggression and violence among states, have been promoted by the Security Council under the provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter, as confirmed by several examples in Africa and Asia. Frequent employment of peacekeeping missions contributed to making these missions the main tool of management of peace and international security as well as to changing significantly the purposes and methods of the missions, and making them more effective. In other words, a specific approach to conflict management and humanitarian intervention has been developed by the main international organisation responsible for global security, and this approach has created room and friction for the action of NGOs in crisis and conflict management.

In Chapter 4 the dialogue between the UN and NGOs in the field of humanitarian intervention is described, stressing the potential for coordination as well as the main differences and frictions.

Within the EU system, cooperation with neighbouring countries and the developing world can be considered an anticipation of a more structured approach to peace and security management. Through participation in official programmes, European NGOs have promoted many initiatives on humanitarian aid, especially in Africa. This has provided NGOs with an important opportunity for engagement in conflict prevention and management, and for expanding NGOs' active role in EU peace missions' deployment. Chapter 5 stresses the NGOs' participation in EU operations and humanitarian emergencies. Special attention is given to the relation between NGOs and EU institutions responsible for security and foreign policy, and for humanitarian interventions.

The final chapter is based on data provided by the survey research conducted in Geneva and Brussels between 2009 and 2011. NGOs are studied as humanitarian intervention actors. In particular, their roles in peacebuilding operations are explored, as well as their main achievements in the framework of the principles that distinguish humanitarian action at the global level.

The Conclusions attempt to move from scholarly analysis to critical engagement with the real world of policy. On the basis of the empirical data, the main assumption is that, in the current phase of world politics, the context in which global emergency policies are demanded, developed and carried out is one of change. A humanitarian system of actors, institutions, rules and practices is gradually emerging and strengthening.

Empirically based remarks on the NGOs' potential to reduce violence and manage humanitarian emergencies in cooperation with the most important IGOs confirm that they are full members of the humanitarian system and their roles are destined to increase.